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Compromising The Press

Most newsmen, we like to think, would not compromise their profession by hiding behind it to act as Central Intelligence Agency informants. When it became known that one journalist was doing this (and that would almost certainly come to light sooner or later) suspicion would thenceforth tarnish and hamper all American correspondents abroad.

Even in the absence of other valid misgivings, this consideration surely would dissuade most journalists from doing undercover work for the CIA. Some might be persuaded, however—and in this we believe they would be wrong—that to do so was their patriotic duty.

For this and other reasons, we back the American Society of Newspaper Editors' urging that Congress bar the CIA from recruiting and hiring reporters as informants. The position taken by

the Society's Freedom of Information Committee is sound: that, as spokesman Joseph R.L. Sterne of the Baltimore Sun told the Senate Intelligence Committee, his practice "suggests to the world that the American press is an investigative arm of the CIA..."

The credibility of the American press is of far greater importance to our country than whatever information reporters might unearth as CIA operatives. The proposed CIA charter prohibits the agency from disguising its agents as journalists, clergymen or educators. This provision should be extended to ban the use of bona fide journalists as informants. Such a ban need not interfere with another charter provision whereby occasional information could be supplied to the CIA by reporters on a voluntary basis, without pay.